

The World's Smallest and Largest Exhibition Space

Text by Jacob Lillemose, 2011

Sam Jedig has never simply accepted the physical and conceptual boundaries of traditional exhibition spaces. Since 1991, when he sent the satellite project Stalke Out of Space into orbit as a mobile and changeable extension of Stalke Galleri, he has repeatedly explored alternative exhibition formats and contexts. The essence of this exploration is that art transcends institutional determinations and connects directly to the emotional and social energies in the lives of people when they are not in museums or galleries.

Artstamp.dk is the latest manifestation of Stalke Out of Space and is a project Jedig has been working on since 2007, based on making his own stamps and inviting other artists to create stamps. Measured along a ruler, this could easily be the world's smallest exhibition space. But at the same time, it is potentially the world's largest. And it is this double nature of the stamp — being both a small object and part of the postal system's infrastructure, able to travel across the world — that has allowed the project to carry both poetic and political messages.

Artstamp.dk draws on the mail art tradition that emerged in the 1960s as a counter-movement to the commercial art world's exclusivity, functioning as a social experiment in which the material of correspondence had a special form for personal communication. While much mail art unfolds across the entire envelope, outside and inside, Artstamp.dk focuses primarily on the stamp, adding symbolic value, while also keeping the work in circulation. The various "art stamps" can thus be seen as free agents. Their symbolic value is often political, even critical, and as they circulate, they become less a stamp in the traditional sense and more a representation of unofficial institutions and the ideals those institutions might have.

In an age when the Internet is making the postal system redundant, it may seem nostalgic, if not downright anachronistic, to make art on and through paper-based stamps. But technological progress has not diminished the importance of human communication between sender and recipient. And through its aesthetic exploration of the possibilities of the stamp, Artstamp.dk points out that the value of this communication is not about using ever more advanced technology, but about expressing something about the world we live in that can inspire a broader discussion.

Jacob Lillemose – Danish art critic, curator

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